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WAR MESSAGE

OF

PRESIDENT WILSON

AND

PROCLAMATION

Declaring State of War

INCLUDING

RULES FOR CONDUCT OF ENEMY ALIENS

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War Message of President Wilson

Delivered to Sixty-Fifth Congress of the United
States, April Second, Nineteen - Seventeen

The text of President Wilson's address to the special session of Congress follows:

I have called the Congress into extraordinary session because there are serious—very serious—choices of policy to be made—and made immediately—which was neither right nor constitutionally permissible that I should assume the responsibility of making.

On the third of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the imperial German government that on and after the first day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coast of Europe or any of the ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean. That has seemed to be the object of the German submarine warfare earlier in the war, but since April of last year the imperial government had somewhat restrained the commanders of its undersea craft in conformity with its promise then given to us that passenger boats should not be sunk, and that due warning would be given to all other vessels which its submarines might seek to destroy, when no resistance was offered or escape attempted, and care taken that their crews were given at least a fair chance to save their lives in their open boats. Their precautions taken were meager and haphazard enough, as was proved in distressing instance after instance in the progress of the cruel and unmanly business, but a certain degree of restraint was observed.

The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with belligerents. Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium, tho the latter were provided with safe conduct thru the proscribed areas by the German government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or principle.

I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations. International

law had its origin in the attempt to set up some law, which would be respected and observed upon the seas, where no nation had right of dominion and where lay the free highways of the world. By painful stage after stage has that law been built up with meager enough results indeed, after all was accomplished that could be accomplished, but always with a clear view, at least, of what the heart and conscience of mankind demanded.

This minimum of right the German government has swept aside under the plea of retaliation and necessity and because it had no weapons which it could use at sea except these, which it is impossible to employ as it is employing them without throwing to the winds all scruples of humanity or of respect for the understandings that were supposed to underlie the intercourse of the world.

I am not now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of non-combatants, men, women and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be.

The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind. It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind. Each nation must decide for itself how it will meet it. The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness of judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away. Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion.

When I addressed the Congress on the 26th of February last I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence.

But armed neutrality, it now appears, is impracticable. Because submarines are in effect outlaws when used as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping, it is impossible to defend ships against their attacks, as the law of nations has assumed that merchantmen would defend themselves against privateers or cruisers, visible craft giving chase upon the open sea.

It is common prudence in such circumstances, grim necessity indeed, to endeavor to destroy them before they have shown their own intention. They must be dealt with upon sight, if dealt with at all.

The German government denies the right of neutrals to use arms at all within the areas of the sea which it has prescribed,

even in the defense of rights which no modern publicist has ever before questioned their right to defend. The intimation is conveyed that the armed guards which we have placed on our merchant ships will be treated as beyond the pale of law and subject to be dealt with as pirates would be. Armed neutrality is ineffectual enough at best; in such circumstances and in the face of such pretensions it is worse than ineffectual; it is likely once to produce what it was meant to prevent; it is practically certain to draw us into the war without either the rights or the effectiveness of belligerents.

There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making. We will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are not common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life.

With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the imperial German government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent, which has thus been thrust upon it, and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thoro state of defense, but also to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the government of the German empire to terms and end the war.

What this will involve is clear. It will involve the utmost practicable co-operation in counsel and action with the governments now at war with Germany, and, as incident to that, the extension to those governments of the most liberal financial credits, in order that our resources may, so far as possible, be added to theirs. It will involve the organization and mobilization of all the material resources of the country to supply the materials of war and serve the incidental needs of the Nation in the most abundant, and yet the most economical and efficient way possible. It will involve the immediate full equipment of the Navy in all respects, but particularly in supplying it with the best means of dealing with the enemy's submarines. It will involve the immediate addition to the armed forces of the United States already provided for by law in case of war, at least 500,000 men, who should, in my opinion, be chosen upon the principle of universal liability to service, and also the authorization of subsequent additional increments of equal force so soon as they may be needed and can be handled in training.

It will involve also, of course, the granting of adequate credits to the Government, sustained, I hope, so far as they can equitably be sustained by the present generation by well-conceived taxation. I say sustained so far as may be equitable by taxation, because it seems to me that it would be most unwise to base the credits which will now be necessary entirely on money borrowed. It is our duty, I most respectfully urge, to protect our people as far

as we may against the very serious hardships and evils which would be likely to arise out of the inflation which would be produced by vast loans.

In carrying out the measures by which these things are to be accomplished we should keep constantly in mind the wisdom of interfering as little as possible in our own preparation and in the equipment of our own military forces with the duty—for it it will be a very practical duty—of supplying the nations already at war with Germany with the materials which they can obtain only from us or by our assistance. They are in the field and we should help them in every way to be effective there.

I shall take the liberty of suggesting, thru the several executive departments of the Government for the consideration of your committees, measures for the accomplishment of the several objects I have mentioned. I hope that it will be your pleasure to deal with them as having been framed after very careful thought by the branch of the Government upon which the responsibility of conducting the war and safeguarding the nation will most directly fall.

While we do these things, these deeply momentous things, let us be very clear and make very clear to all the world what our motives and what our objects are. My own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months, and I do not believe that the thought of the nation has been altered or clouded by them.

I have exactly the same things in mind now that I had in mind when I addressed the Senate on the 22d of January last; the same that I had in mind when I addressed the Congress on the 3d of February and on the 26th of February.

Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth insure the observance of those principles.

Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances.

We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling toward them but one of sympathy and friendship. It was not upon their impulse that their Government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval.

It was a war determined upon as wars used to be determined on in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the

Interest of dynasties or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellowmen as pawns and tools.

Self-governed nations do not fill their neighbor states with spies, or set the course of intrigue to bring about some critical posture of affairs which will give them an opportunity to strike and make conquest. Such designs can be successfully worked only under cover and where no one has the right to ask questions.

Cunningly contrived plans of deception or aggression, carried, it may be, from generation to generation, can be worked out and kept from the light only within the privacy of courts or behind the carefully guarded confidences of a narrow and privileged class. They are happily impossible where public opinion commands and insists upon full information concerning all the nation's affairs.

A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or conserve its covenants. It must be a league of honor, a partnership of opinion.

Intrigue would eat its vitals away: the plottings of inner circles who could plan what they would and render account to no one would be a corruption seated at its very heart. Only free peoples can hold their purpose and their honor steady to a common end and prefer the interests of mankind to any narrow interest of their own.

Does not every American feel that assurance has been added to our hope for the future peace of the world by the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia?

Russia was known by those who knew it best to have been always in fact democratic at heart, in all the vital habits of her thought, in all the intimate relationships of her people that spoke their natural instinct, their habitual attitude toward life.

The autocracy that crowned the summit of her political structure, long as it has stood and terrible as was the reality of its power, was not in fact of Russian origin, character or purpose; and now it has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their native majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a league of honor.

One of the things that has served to convince us that the Prussian autocracy was not and could never be our friend is that from the very outset of the present war it has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies and set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot against our national unity and council, our peace within and without our industries and our commerce.

Indeed, it is now evident that its spies were here even before the war began, and it unhappily is not a matter of conjecture, but a fact proved in our courts of justice, that the intrigues which have more than once come perilously near to disturbing the peace and dislocating the industries of the country have been carried on at the instigation, with the support, and even under

the personal direction of official agents of the Imperial German Government accredited to the Government of the United States.

Even in checking these things and trying to extirpate them we have sought to put the most generous interpretations possible upon them because we knew that their source lay, not in any hostile feeling or purpose of the German people toward us (who were, no doubt, as ignorant of them as we ourselves were), but only in the selfish designs of a government that did what it pleased and told its people nothing. But they have played their part in serving to convince us at last that that government entertains no real friendship for us and means to act against our peace and security at its convenience. That it means to stir up enemies against us at our very doors, the intercepted note to the German Minister at Mexico City is eloquent evidence.

We are accepting this challenge of hostile purpose because we know that in such a government, following such methods, we can never have a friend; and that in the presence of its organized power, always lying in wait to accomplish we know not what purpose, there can be no assured security for the democratic governments of the world.

We are now about to accept the gage of battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power. We are glad now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretense about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included; for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the trusted foundation of political liberty.

We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been as secure as the faith and the freedom of the nations can make them.

Just because we fight without rancor, animus, not in enmity toward a people nor with the desire to bring any injury or disadvantage upon them, but only in armed opposition to an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity and of right and is running amuck.

We are, let me say again, the sincere friends of the German people and shall desire nothing so much as the early re-establishment of intimate relations of mutual advantage between us—however hard it may be for them, for the time being, to believe that this is spoken from our hearts. We have borne with their present government thru all these bitter months because of that friendship—exercising a patience and forbearance which would otherwise have been impossible. We shall, happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and action toward the millions of men and women of German birth

and native sympathy who live amongst us and share our life, and we shall be proud to prove it toward all who are in fact loyal to their neighbors and to this government in the hour of test. They are, most of them, as true and loyal Americans as if they had never known any other fealty or allegiance.

They will be prompt to stand with us in rebuking and restraining the few who may be of a different mind and purpose.

If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression; but, if it lifts its head at all, it will lift it only here and there and without countenance except from a lawless and malignant few.

It is a distressful and oppressive duty, gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful country into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations, and make the world itself at last free.

To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

PRESIDENT WILSON'S WAR PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, The Congress of the United States in the exercise of the constitutional authority vested in them have resolved by joint resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives bearing date this day "that a state of war between the United States and the Imperial German Government which has been thrust upon the United States is hereby formally declared:

"WHEREAS, It is provided by Section 4067 of the Revised Statutes, as follows:

"'Whenever there is declared a war between the United States and any foreign nation or government or any invasion or predatory incursion perpetuated, attempted or threatened against the territory of the United States, by any foreign nation or government and the President makes public proclamation of the event, all natives, citizens, denizens or subjects of a hostile nation or government being male of the age of 14 years and upward who shall be within the United States and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed as alien enemies.

"'The President is authorized in any such event by his proclamation thereof or other public acts, to direct the conduct to be observed on the part of the United States toward the aliens who become so liable; the manner and degree of the restraint to which they shall be subject and in what cases and upon what security their residence shall be permitted and to provide for the removal of those who, not being permitted to reside within the United States, refuse or neglect to depart therefrom; and to establish any such regulations which are found necessary in the premises and for the public safety;'

"WHEREAS, By Sections 4068, 4069 and 4070 of the Revised Statutes further provision is made relative to alien enemies;

"Now, therefore, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim, to all whom it may concern, that a state of war exists between the United States and the Imperial German Government, and I do specially direct all officers, civil or military, of the United States, that they exercise vigilance and zeal in the discharge of the duties incident to such a state of war, and I do, moreover, earnestly appeal to all American citizens that they, in loyal devotion to their country, dedicated from its foundation to the principles of liberty and justice, uphold the laws of the land and give undivided and willing support to those measures which may be adopted by the constitutional authorities in prosecuting the war to a successful issue and in obtaining a secure and just peace;

"And, acting under and by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution of the United States and the said sections of the Revised Statutes,

"I do hereby further proclaim and direct that the conduct to be observed on the part of the United States toward all natives, citizens, denizens or subjects of Germany, being male, of the age of 14 years and upward, who shall be within the United States and not actually naturalized, who, for the purpose of this proclamation and under such sections of the Revised Statutes, are termed alien enemies, shall be as follows:

"All alien enemies are enjoined to preserve the peace toward the United States and to refrain from crime against the public safety and from violating the laws of the United States and of the states and territories thereof and to refrain from actual hostility or giving information, aid or comfort to the enemies of the United States and to comply strictly with the regulations which are hereby or which may be from time to time promulgated by the President, and so long as they shall conduct themselves in accordance with law they shall be undisturbed in the peaceful pursuit of their lives and occupations and be accorded the consideration due to all peaceful and law-abiding persons, except so far as restrictions may be necessary for their own protection and for the safety of the United States; and toward such alien enemies as conduct themselves in accordance with law, all citizens of the United States are enjoined to preserve the peace and to treat them with all such friendliness as may be compatible with loyalty and allegiance to the United States.

"And all alien enemies who fail to conduct themselves as so enjoined, in addition to all other penalties prescribed by law, shall be liable to restraint or to give security or to remove and depart from the United States in the manner prescribed by Sections 4069 and 4070 of the Revised Statutes and as prescribed in the regulations duly promulgated by the President.

"And, pursuant to the authority vested in me, I hereby declare and establish the following regulations, which I find necessary in the premises and for the public safety:

"FIRST—An alien enemy shall not have in his possession at any time or place any firearms, weapons or implement of war, or component parts thereof, ammunition, Maxim or other silencer, arms or explosives or material used in the manufacture of explosives;

"SECOND—An alien enemy shall not have in his possession at any time or place or use or operate any aircraft or wireless apparatus or any form of signaling device or any form of cipher code or any paper, document or book, written or printed in cipher, or in which there may be invisible writing;

"THIRD—All property found in the possession of an alien enemy in violation of the foregoing regulations shall be subject to seizure by the United States;

"FOURTH—An alien enemy shall not approach or be found within one-half of a mile of any Federal or State fort, camp, arsenal, aircraft station, Government or naval vessel, navy yard, factory or work shop for the manufacture of munitions of war or any products for use of the Army or Navy;

"FIFTH—An alien enemy shall not write, print or publish any attack or threat against the Government or Congress of the United States or either branch thereof, or against the measures or policy

of the United States or against the persons or property of any person in the military, naval or civil service of the United States or of the states or territories or of the District of Columbia or of the municipal governments therein;

“SIXTH—An alien enemy shall not commit or abet any hostile acts against the United States or give information, aid or comfort to its enemies;

“SEVENTH—An alien enemy shall not reside in or continue to reside in, to remain in or enter any locality which the President may from time to time designate by an executive order as a prohibitive area in which residence by an alien enemy shall be found by him to constitute a danger to the public peace and safety of the United States except by permit from the President and except under such limitations or restrictions as the President may prescribe;

“EIGHTH—An alien enemy whom the President shall have reasonable cause to believe to be aiding or about to aid the enemy or to be at large to the danger of the public peace or safety of the United States or to have violated or be about to violate any of these regulations, shall remove to any location designated by the President by executive order and shall not remove therefrom, without permit, or shall depart from the United States if so required by the President;

“NINTH—No alien enemy shall depart from the United States until he shall have received such permit as the President shall prescribe, or except under order of Court, Judge or Justice, under Sections 4069 and 4070 of the Revised Statutes;

“TENTH—No alien enemy shall land in or enter the United States except under such restrictions and at such places as the President may prescribe;

“ELEVENTH—If necessary to prevent violation of the regulations all alien enemies will be obliged to register;

“TWELFTH—An alien enemy whom there may be reasonable cause to believe to be aiding or about to aid the enemy, or who be at large to the danger of the public peace or safety, or who violates, or who attempts to violate, or of whom there is reasonable grounds to believe that he is about to violate any regulation to be promulgated by the President, or any criminal law of the United States, or of the states or territories thereof, will be subject to summary arrest by the United States Marshal or his deputy or such other officers as the President shall designate, and confinement in such penitentiary, prison, jail, military camp or other place of detention as may be directed by the President.

“This proclamation and the regulations herein contained shall extend and apply to all land and water, continental or insular, in any way within the jurisdiction of the United States.”

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